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Spring 2-1-1998

PSC 100S.01: Introduction to American Government

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PSC 100 INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Professor Tompkins
Spring 1998

Office: LA 352 Phone: 243-2721
Office hours: Any time I'm not in class.

Course Content

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. It combines factual description of institutions and processes of American government with critical analyses of how well the political system works.

Course Objectives

1. to increase knowledge.
2. to improve writing skills.
3. to develop analytical skills.

Required Text

Walter E. Volkmer, American Government (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998)

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are required to read all assigned readings, attend all lectures, and take four exams (130 points each) and one quiz (40 points). There is no final exam or extra credit.

Note: Make-up exams are given only in the event of illness or death in the family. If either should occur, please leave a message on my phone (243-2721).

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- 504-560 points - A (90%)
- 448-503 points - B (80%)
- 392-447 points - C (70%)
- 336-391 points - D (60%)

Classroom Etiquette

1. Kaiman Readers - Please put your Kaimin away by the time class begins (the rustling of papers distracts from the learning process).
2. Sleepers - Please stay home in bed if you need more sleep (it is distracting to some, particularly the teacher, and probably doesn't contribute to effective learning).

3. Gabbers - Please don't talk with your neighbors (it is distracting and makes it difficult for others to hear). If you need clarification of a point, please raise your hand.
4. Early Packers - Please sit quietly until the teacher dismisses class (the noise generated by a hundreds students packing their things is truly awesome).

Schedule of Lectures and Reading Assignments

Thurs., Jan. 29 Our Liberal Ideology
Read Chapter 1, and Handout on Classical Liberalism.

Theme: Ideological differences as a source of political conflict (See exam question #1)

Puzzler 1: In what sense are all Americans Liberals?

Puzzler 2: What distinguishes a liberal from a conservative?

Tues., Feb. 3 Our Liberal Ideology
Read Handout on Modern Liberals and Conservatives

Thurs., Feb. 5 ****Quiz over Constitution**** (Read pp. 369-382)

Tues., Feb 10 The War of Independence and the Articles of Confederation
Read Chapter 2, Declaration of Independence, pp. 351-352, and Articles of Confederation, pp. 353-357.

Theme: Separation from England and the Articles of Confederation as products of fear. (See exam question #2).

Puzzler 1: Was the War of Independence a social revolution or a political rebellion?

Puzzler 2: Why does the Declaration make no mention of parliament, nor the colonists' rights as English citizens?

Puzzler 3: Why did the first Constitution fail?

Thurs., Feb 12 Constitutional Principles
Read The Antifederalists, pp. 358-361, and Madison's The Federalist, No. 10, pp. 362-365.

Theme: Government inefficiency as the price of liberty. (See exam question #3)

Tues., Feb. 17 *****Exam #1*****

Thurs., Feb. 19 The Federal System
Read Chapter 3.

Theme: Federal-state relations: the lost balance of power. (See exam question #1)

Tues., Feb. 24 Fiscal Federalism

Puzzler: What do federal grants-in-aid and narcotics have in common?

Thurs., Feb. 26 Civil Liberties
Read Chapter 11.

Theme: The costs and benefits of our commitment to First Amendment freedoms. (See exam question #2)

Tues., March 3 ****Optional Review****

Thurs., March 5 *****Exam #2*****

Tues., March 10 Political Parties as Linkage Mechanisms
Read Chapter 5.

Theme: Linkage mechanisms make democracy possible. (See essay question #1)

Thurs., March 12 The Structure of Political Parties

Tues., March 24 Interest Groups and PACs as Linkage Mechanisms

Thurs., March 26 The Presidential Nominations Process
Read Chapter 6.

Theme: Is there a better way to nominate presidential candidates? (See exam question #2)

Tues., March 31 The Electoral College System

Theme: Is the electoral college system obsolete? (See exam question #3)

Thurs., April 2 ****Optional Review****

Tues., April 7 *****Exam #3*****

Thurs., April 9 Congress
Read Chapter 7.

Theme: Why it is so difficult for the majority party to enact its legislative agenda (See essay question #1).

Tues., April 14 The Legislative Process

Thurs., April 16 The Chief Executive
Read Chapter 8.

Tues., April 21 The Bureaucracy
Thurs., April 23 Read Chapter 9.

Theme: Career civil servants as policy makers: the myth of bureaucratic neutrality (See essay question #2).

Tues., April 28 The Judiciary
Thurs., April 30 Read Chapter 10.

Theme: The Supreme Court as a policy making body: the myth of objective judicial review. (See essay question #3)

Tues., May 5 ****Optional Review****

Thurs., May 7 *****Exam #4*****

Essay Exam Questions (One question will be selected at random on the day of the test)

Exam #1 (Tuesday, February 17)

1. **Theme:** Ideological differences as a source of political conflict. Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define Classical Liberalism and its principles, explain how and why our commitment to these principles has changed over the years, distinguish a modern "conservative" from a modern "liberal", and explain how differences in ideological values can be a source of political conflict in our society.

2. **Theme: Separation from England and the Articles of Confederation as products of fear.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to describe the political struggle with England after 1763 and the meaning the colonists attached to these historical events. With this foundation in place you will want to explain how the colonists fears are reflected in a) the Declaration of Independence and b) the Articles of Confederation. (In the process make sure you clarify why the colonists decided separation was necessary, and why the Articles of Confederation created a weak form of government.)

3. **Theme: Government inefficiency as the price of liberty.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to identify Madison's three fears regarding democracy, explain how he designed the Constitution to address these three fears, and assess the results in terms of efficiency and liberty. In the process you will want to distinguish democracy as traditionally defined from the liberal democracy that Madison sought to establish.

Exam #2 (Thursday, March 5)

1. **Theme: Federal-state relations: the lost balance of power.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define federalism, explain why the Founding Fathers chose this type of system, and explain how the Supreme Court and grants-in-aid programs have upset the balance of power between the states and the national government.

2. **Theme: The costs and benefits of our commitment to the First Amendment freedoms.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain the classic Liberal defense of freedom of expression and belief, and use appropriate examples to assess the trade-off that results from our commitment to these freedoms.

Exam #3 (Tuesday, April 7)

1. **Theme: The linkage mechanisms that make democracy possible.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to describe in some detail how Americans are "linked" to governments by political parties, interest groups, and political action committees. You will also want to assess how well they seem to be performing their linkage roles.

2. **Theme: Is there a better way to nominate presidential candidates?** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain what must take place at the party convention for a candidate to capture the party nomination, explain what must take place before the convention in order to win the nomination, and assess the merits of this particular method for selecting candidates.

3. **Theme: Is the electoral college system obsolete?** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to discuss why the founding fathers selected this system over the direct popular vote method, how the system operated during the first few elections, and how it works today. You will also want to provide an argument regarding why it should or should not be reformed.

Exam #4 (Thursday, May 7)

1. **Theme: Why it is so difficult for the majority party to enact its legislative agenda.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to describe the "responsible party model of government" and explain why it doesn't work in the United States. Your assessment of difficulties should include analysis of the organizational structure of Congress, what determines how members of congress decide to vote, and the role played by the president in determining the legislative success of the majority party. (Perhaps choose a policy, such as tax reform legislation, to illustrate the difficulties the majority party might face in enacting it).

2. **Theme: Career civil servants as policy makers: the myth of bureaucratic neutrality.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain the myth of bureaucratic neutrality, the kinds of policy decisions civil servants actually make (and thus why the accountability issue arises), and how both congress and the president attempt to hold them accountable.

3. **Theme: The Supreme Court as a policy-making body: the myth of objective judicial review.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define the myth, explain why and how the Supreme Court protects and promotes it, review the evidence suggesting that the myth is false, and explain why the court nonetheless is unlikely to make decisions that greatly alter the status quo.

Criteria for Grading Essay Questions

1. Thoroughness of answer	1	2	3	4	5	X6 =
2. Sophistication of analysis	1	2	3	4	5	X6 =
3. Organization & logical devel.	1	2	3	4	5	X5 =
4. Clarity of expression	1	2	3	4	5	X3 =
5. Grammar and punctuation	See Below					

1. Thoroughness of answer. The best essays respond to each part of the question thoroughly and with sufficient detail to demonstrate that the subject is fully understood.

2. Sophistication of analysis. In the best essays, the author does much more than just explain or describe. He or she shows evidence of having thought about the subject in depth. The subject is analyzed from many angles and assessed critically.

3. Organization and logical development. The best essays show evidence of prior planning as if they have been outlined in advance. They have a purpose or theme which is introduced in the introduction, developed in the body of the essay, and returned to in the conclusion. Paragraphs are well constructed and are linked to each other in a logical sequence using transitional sentences. Arguments, examples, facts, opinions, and details explain the main point and lend credibility to each point being developed.

4. Clarity of expression. In the best essays, words are chosen carefully and sentences are constructed purposefully so that each point the author makes is expressed as exactly, precisely, and clearly as possible.

5. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The best essays are characterized by consistently correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Verbs agree with their subjects. There are no single-sentence paragraphs, sentence fragments, or run-on sentences.

One point will be subtracted from the test score for each occurrence of the following:

- single sentence paragraph
- verb-subject disagreement
- sentence fragment (incomplete sentence)
- run-on sentence

However, no points will be lost due to spelling in in-class exams.